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DE RUEHBO #8661 3611313  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 271313Z DEC 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0641  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7960  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ DEC 9152  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5745  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6449  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 2119  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4240

UNCLAS BOGOTA 008661

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SUBJECT: NICARAGUA URGES FARC "BROTHER" TO RELEASE HOSTAGES

¶1. On December 7, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega called on his "beloved brother," Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) leader Manual Marulanda, to free Ingrid Betancourt, apparently in response to Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez' appeal for his involvement. Ortega added that "in the name of all Latin American revolutionaries and as a signal to work for peace," such a gesture would help strengthen the FARC and its leadership. He said he had spoken directly to Chavez and volunteered his assistance.

¶2. On December 12, Ortega ordered the Nicaraguan military to be placed on alert. The next day he reiterated the need for the GOC and the FARC to re-open negotiations aimed at the obtaining the release of all hostages. He said he hoped President Uribe would listen to his message because, although the FARC had the will to release Betancourt, there was also "serious risk" that she could be killed. Her death would then be used to blame the FARC. Ortega said he was not meddling in another country's affairs but rather reacting to the hostage families' appeals for help, concerns which go "beyond borders". He criticized the GOC's conditions for negotiations with the FARC, accusing Uribe of "condemning Betancourt and the other hostages to death" and of bowing to "imperialist pressures."

¶3. Ortega's comments came on the heels of a December 13 International Court of Justice ruling in favor of Colombia's sovereignty over San Andres and two other islands disputed by Nicaragua. Still, the Court asserted jurisdiction to rule on Nicaragua's claims to three other cays, as well as to de-limit the maritime boundary between the two countries.

¶4. Colombian Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo lodged an "energetic protest" to Ortega's comments on December 14, rebuking Ortega for using positive terms towards a narco-terrorist group without consideration for the FARC's victims. He denounced Ortega's comments as "unhelpful" to internal Colombian matters and rejected his characterization of the situation. The rift with Venezuela and Nicaragua has prompted a private request by Colombian police to Post's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) not to invite more Venezuelan or Nicaraguan participants to its international training courses.

Nichols